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ABSTRACT

A study sought to discover several general principles of student attrition, based on investigations into students dropping out of school carried out between 1973 and 1986. These investigations included a survey of 21 head instructors and 289 students at an Ontario community college, impressions gained from students dropping out of adult basic education as well as postsecondary programs in northern Alberta, and a description of how a change in curriculum was responsible for a significant reduction in the high school dropout rate on a Saskatchewan Indian Reserve. The study concluded that there are many possible reasons for which students drop out, and skill and experience are needed to identify the right reasons and prescribe the correct remedy. Some of the reasons are special problems of clearly defined groups; two of them are: (1) the identity crisis of late adolescence and young adulthood; and (2) cultural problems encountered by Indian students working with Caucasian teachers. Other reasons for which students drop out are related to institutional flaws and may include a failure of institutional policies, a poorly designed curriculum, inadequate pre-enrollment counseling and student selection, poor instruction, poor communication within the institution, and incomplete or misleading information about students. Although the subject of attrition is always painful, the study suggests that some unnecessary pain and guilt can be avoided by remembering that not all dropouts can be prevented and not all attrition is necessarily bad. The study of attrition should be recognized as a legitimate specialty within the larger discipline of education. The appendixes include survey forms for instructors and students as well as numerous tables analyzing the students' responses. (KC)

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FEAR AND GUILT IN ADULT EDUCATION:

A Personal Account of Investigations Into Students Dropping Out

Christian Stuhr

A CHCC Research Service Publication

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Executive Summary

This is a personal account of the discovery of several general principles of student attrition. It is based on investigations into students dropping out of school which were carried out between 1973 and 1986. These investigations include a series of relatively formal studies conducted at an Ontario community college, impressions gained from students dropping out of adult basic education as well as post-secondary programs in northern Alberta, and the story of how a change in curriculum was responsible for a significant reduction in the high school drop-out rate on a Saskatchewan Indian Reserve.

The conclusions are:

1. Because there are many possible reasons for which students drop out, skill and experience are needed to identify the right reasons and prescribe the correct remedy.

2. Some of the reasons discussed in this paper are special problems of clearly-defined groups. Two of these are:

* The identity crisis of late adolescence and young adulthood.
* Cultural problems encountered by Indian students working with Caucasian teachers.

3. Other reasons for which students drop out are related to institutional flaws. These may include:

* A failure of institutional policies.
* A poorly-designed curriculum.
* Inadequate pre-enrolment counselling and student selection.
* Poor instruction or supervision.
* Bad lines of communication within the institution.
* Incomplete or misleading information about students.

Each of these factors can be demonstrably related to student attrition.

4. The subject of attrition is always painful - a fact that anyone studying the phenomenon does well to remember when working with students and instructors. Some unnecessary pain and guilt can be avoided by remembering that not all drop-outs can be prevented, and not all attrition is necessarily bad.

5. The study of attrition is an applied science. However, it has been neglected by teachers, by administrators, and by professors of education. It is an inter-disciplinary science, and deserves to be recognized as a legitimate specialty within the larger discipline of education.

Christian Stuhr
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I. The Problem. Adult education is voluntary, which suggests that drop-outs from adult programs will always be with us. They are usually considered to be a problem, and rightly so. Before they leave, these people require their share of institutional resources, including staff time; then, when they finally do depart, the institution and the taxpayers who supported them have little to show for the expenses that were incurred.

It is also true that staff feel more than a little guilty about drop-outs. This complicates the matter. Staff feel rejected, much like the man or woman whose spouse has left. The thought, "What did I do wrong?" is bound to come up, both when people are deserted by their spouses, and when programs are deserted by their students - and with similar results. Whether or not the guilt feeling is justified, it is a very human reaction - and it is very human to avoid the subject which arouses this unpleasant emotion. Divorced people do not like to give out details of their marital break up; if they do, their story is not always the unbiased truth. In the same way, educators are not likely to speak openly about the problems of student attrition.

This does not mean that we are entirely silent. If we are asked for our opinion about students dropping out of school, our conditioned response is to take a firm stand against it. Unfortunately, a thoughtful response is not very common.

From time to time, however, good reasons arise for us to take a serious interest in student attrition, to study it, and to discuss the problem in public. These reasons become most apparent whenever institutional funding is closely tied to student enrolments. For example, in Ontario during the 1970s the funding of each college of applied arts and technology was tied to the number of students enrolled at that college as of a specified date in the Fall term. The more students who had dropped out by the "audit date", the greater the financial loss to the institution. Similar situations may be found in K-12 school systems. For instance, it has been the practice of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to allocate funding to Band-operated schools on Indian Reserves in proportion to the number of students reported by the Bands on nominal rolls submitted each Fall on a specified counting day.

Whenever institutional funding depends immediately and directly on student enrolments, there are some predictable consequences. A few of us will resort to outright fraud, augmenting our enrolment lists with non-existent students. Others among us are glacially slow to strike drop-outs from the rolls. All of us, including the honest men and women who make up our great majority, will do everything in our power to minimize attrition - at least until the day on which our students are officially counted.

My own interest in drop-outs goes back to the early seventies. One day, I was offered the chance to be relieved of my college teaching duties in order to devote my full attention for the next six months to a study of drop-outs.

I did not refuse.

The challenge was greater than expected. My work on attrition continued over a period of about thirteen years (1973 to 1986), dividing unequally into three distinct phases.

The early period spanned six months in 1973. I reviewed various institutional attendance policies; interviewed the head instructors of a number of post-secondary programs; surveyed students in order to determine some of their attitudes toward the college; and finally, arranged for a psychologist to conduct in-depth interviews with current and former students, including both graduates and drop-outs. This was the most systematic, and probably also the most productive phase of my work, and took place at an urban Ontario college.

During the middle period (1976 to 1980), I participated briefly in two Alberta follow-up studies of students in adult basic education or in post-secondary programs. In a sense, the results obtained here did not produce fundamentally new insights, but confirmed and elaborated on what had been found previously. The students had been attending northern Alberta training facilities which were located in smaller communities, but always accessible by road. A majority of respondents were Indian or Metis; perhaps one-third were of European descent.

During the late period (1982-86), I had the opportunity to introduce certain organizational and curriculum changes into a small school system located on an Indian Reserve. Although my work in this system did not extend beyond Grade 12, and although the students of this system came from a cultural background quite different from that of mainstream Canadians, the results nonetheless have wider implications.

II. <u>The Policy Review.</u> Irregular attendance is often a sign that a student is experiencing serious difficulties. Regardless of individual circumstances, it seems clear that a poorly-attending student is more likely to drop out than one who attends well. It is also a well-founded assumption that a troubled student who gets prompt and effective help is more likely to stay in the program than one who does not.

One useful purpose of attendance policies is to identify students who are likely to drop out because of personal problems, and to get them whatever help the institution can provide.

Now it is in the nature of institutional policies to reflect deeply held (and usually unstated) assumptions. In the case of the college where this review was done, one such assumption was that college students are mature adults. As such, they were deemed to be responsible for their own attendance at class; they were not to be harrassed by petty regulations such as are found in the K-12 system.

Accordingly, the earliest official statement of attendance policy, taken from the calendar of the college's second year of operation, included the following passage:

> "A mature approach is taken toward attendance at the College. It is the responsibility of the student to attend all lectures. Attendance will not be taken or recorded by administration.

> "Laboratory work is mandatory... [Instructors] also have the prerogative, if they so wish, in their own classes to demand some form of minimum attendance. [Instructors] have the further prerogative of refusing the privilege of writing the final examination...if a student has missed more than 20% of lab periods or periods which have been designated as prerequisite for...final examination... The Registrar will determine, subject of course to the President, whether or not a student will be allowed to write the final examinations..."

Among the faculty, this was generally perceived as strong administrative support for compulsory attendance in laboratory classes. For all other classes, it was believed that the rights of the students as mature adults to attend as they saw fit counted for more with administrators than did any rights of instructors to enforce attendance in their classes. Regardless of the intention of administration, the perception was that a student's right to be the judge of his or her own attendance would outweigh the instructor's right to enforce attendance in any class except a laboratory period.

The following year, the attendance statement in the calendar was revised as follows:

> "Students are advised to attend all class meetings and seminars. Attendance may very well be part of the evaluation process. This is particularly true in the case of all scheduled laboratory periods and field work. The compilation and maintenance of attendance records is within the discretionary power of the [instructor] concerned, and their particular requirements will be established during the initial lectures."

The next year, one sentence was added to this:

> "Administration does not keep attendance records."

Another year later, the Director of Student Services stated his expectations rather than a formal policy when he wrote, in a memorandum to all instructors:

> "It has been the policy previously for [instructors] to contact a counsellor when a student has been absent for over a week, so that the reasons for his or her poor attendance may be ascertained and possible assistance given. Please continue to advise the Counselling staff in this manner."

A fair summary of these policies and statements is that an instructor could consider attendance in evaluating a student's work, and could keep attendance records; that counsellors would appreciate being informed of absences exceeding one week, but that attendance was not a direct administration concern.

It is also fair to say that none of this provided for college-wide compulsory attendance. Of course, none of it explicitly prevented instructors from requiring compulsory attendance in their own classes either, but a widespread perception existed that such compulsion was administratively discouraged in all but laboratory classes.

Moreover, an informal survey which was taken at the time revealed that only two instructors out of twenty were aware of the stated expectation to inform the counselling staff of prolonged absences. "Why should I?" one asked. "Our students are mature adults, and I certainly don't keep attendance records."

These policies and perceptions had melancholy if predictable results:

* Sometimes instructors noticed prolonged absences; often they did not.

* If an absence should be noted, the instructor might ignore it, or deal with the matter personally, or refer the student to a counsellor.

* Referral to counsellors was rare. About half of the program heads queried displayed a lukewarm attitude bordering on hostility toward the counsellors of the Student Services department. The counsellors, in turn, reported that fewer than ten percent of the students whom they saw had been referred by instructors.

* In the odd case where a referral was made, the student usually had already missed so many classes that it was impossible to catch up.

* Once the staff of Student Services were informed, they acted without delay: they wrote a letter, often that same day. In exceptional cases, a telephone call might be made, but such an intrusion was thought to be unwarranted in most circumstances. Personal visits were almost unheard of.

Experience at other institutions has suggested that when instructors carefully keep attendance records and work in close liaison with counsellors, many student problems can be identified in the early stages. This allows the college support mechanisms to come into play, and the students to continue their studies. Whenever that happens, attrition is likely to be relatively low.

In the present case, however, there existed a tradition of considering students to be mature adults who are responsible for determining how often they would attend class. It follows from this that instructors have no real right to question that judgment. Such reasoning got in the way of applying attendance policies in a manner that would have effectively lowered the drop-out rate.

As a further consequence, the calendar statements on attendance were generally misinterpreted. They were seen as discouraging compulsory attendance. The memo from the Director of Student Services, asking that counsellors be informed of prolonged absences, was quickly forgotten. (The lingering tension between instructors and counsellors did not help.)

Finally, it was clearly assumed by the administration that the calendar statements and the Director's memo were enough to assure responsible attendance. Equally clearly, they were not enough. Students started skipping classes, got away with it, and ended up by dropping out. Poor communication between the instructors and the counselling staff contributed to the problem.

Policies can be helpful in dealing with attrition. Their failure in this case illustrates their fate if they are poorly thought out, unexplained to staff, and neither monitored nor enforced by management.

III. The Head Instructor Interviews. One early suspicion was that attitudes of program heads (head instructors), and by extension all instructors, might have a measurable effect on student attrition. A questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was drawn up and administered to twenty-five head instructors early in 1973. Four of these interviews were used for pretesting the instrument; since major changes were subsequently made, these four were not used further.

The remaining twenty-one respondents were responsible for twenty-seven post-secondary programs with total enrolments of 855 students in September of 1972.

Mean Attrition Rate and Program Groupings. College records showed that of the 855 students who registered in the Fall, 110 dropped out before the end of the Fall semester. This is a mean attrition rate of 13%.

Statistical tests showed no significant relationship between attrition rate and general field of study. Students in business-related programs had the highest drop-out rate at 16%, followed by students in technical programs (14%) and students in human service programs (10%). These differences are well within the range of chance variations (see Appendix 3 for statistical analysis).

It was quite another story, though, when programs were grouped according to their drop-out rates. The group of programs with the lowest attrition rate included 237 students, of whom only nine (3.8%) dropped out. An intermediate group included 368 students, of whom 49 (13%) dropped out. A third group of programs - those with relatively high attrition - accounted for 250 students and 52 drop-outs (21%). In an obvious sense as well as a statistical one, the three groups experienced significantly different attrition rates in the Fall of 1972. Why?

Some Interview Responses. Almost unanimously, program heads stated that those students who had left their particular program had made the correct decision. The drop-outs were perceived by the program heads as certainly not belonging in their program, and probably not even belonging in the college. Only three of the head instructors allowed that perhaps the students who had dropped out might succeed in a different program.

Most program heads also reported that the Fall semester of any given year was the time of heaviest attrition. In programs extending over more than one year, the Fall semester of the first year was identified.

Attitudes Toward Taking Attendance. Of the twenty-one program heads, twelve reported taking attendance, either formally or informally. Nine said that they did not.

Of the twelve who took attendance, two had experienced high attrition during the previous Fall semester.

Of the nine who did not take attendance, five had experienced high attrition. What does this prove?

It certainly does not prove that the simple act of taking attendance will bring down the attrition rate in college programs. But it does support the idea that students are less likely to drop out if their program heads and instructors are genuinely concerned with student progress, demonstrate that concern by taking attendance, and perhaps offer several other gestures of support as well.

Some Spontaneous Comments. Although no questions were asked about the recruitment policies of the college, seven of the respondents volunteered their opinions. All seven comments were highly critical, and only one came from a respondent in the low-attrition group. It may be inferred that the heads of programs where there was an open admission policy (a) wished that they had more control over admissions, (b) were therefore critical of existing recruitment policies, and (c) also experienced a higher drop-out rate resulting from the attrition of marginal students.

These are a few typical comments volunteered by the head instructors of high-attrition programs:

"Transfers to other programs are not a big factor. Most of the drop-outs shouldn't be in school to begin with."

"Attrition is necessary. Our program is designed to encourage the non-success type to drop out. We give them a work overload in the first semester. If they can't take that, they could never take it on the job."

"We cannot lower our standards."

"Attrition doesn't bother me. Those who leave have good reasons."

"Well, of course most of my drop-outs are unsuited for college - but then, they are unsuited for anything else."

The head instructor who made this last comment had one of the highest drop-out rates in the college. On the subject of attendance, he said, "No, I never take attendance. My grade is based on performance."

This survey of program heads supports the common-sense notion that the attitudes of instructors may have an effect on the attrition rates in programs of instruction. However, it must be remembered that these attitudes are likely also related to other matters, such as admission policies, which in turn have their own effect on the drop-out rate. As will be seen, there are still other factors involved in the attrition process which have nothing to do with the instructors at all.

The study of attrition is a complex subject, involving the interaction of many variables.

IV. The Student Survey. In the Spring of 1973, after the head instructor interviews had been completed, a questionnaire on the effectiveness of college services and programs was administered to first-year students in two-year college programs. This was done during regular class hours, and the responses were recorded by computer. The instrument is reproduced in Appendix 2.

The computer print-out summarized the responses by program of study, as well as by the attrition group to which the student had been assigned. This last term should be explained.

Question 12 of the survey read as follows:

"12. I expect to return in September to complete the second year of my program:

a. almost definitely
b. possibly
c. probably not
d. no opinion"

Those who selected answer (a) were placed in attrition group A - likely to return (n=167). Those who selected (b) were put in attrition group B - may or may not return (n=83), while those who chose (c) went into attrition group C - unlikely to return (n=39).

The purpose of this exercise was to determine how student opinions about the quality of college programs and services relate to their intention to return for the second year of their program. Students were presented with a series of statements and asked to indicate agreement or disagreement with each.

Two hundred eighty-nine usable replies were obtained. These are the results.

Question 1: "The service offered by the Counselling Office is courteous and helpful."

Overall, only nine students out of the entire sample disagreed with this statement. Certainly, there was little if any hostility among students toward counsellors. However, 164 students (57%) did not answer or had no opinion. No statistically significant relationship was found to exist beween the students' intention to return for the second year of their program and their attitude toward the counselling services.

This suggests that under the circumstances at the time, counsellors may not have had much of an effect on the drop-out rate.

Question 2: "The service offered by the student finance office is courteous and helpful."

Of those who had an opinion, most were favorably impressed by the services of the student finance office. About half of the respondents had no opinion, and there was no statistically significant relationship between the answers to this question and the students' intention to return for their second year.

Question 3: "The service offered by the student placement office is courteous and helpful."

Those who expressed an opinion agreed overwhelmingly, but there was no clear relationship between the answers to this question and the students' intention to return for a second year.

Question 4: "The service offered by the bookstore is courteous and helpful."

Again in this case, there was very strong agreement (85%). Evidently, students were much more familiar with the bookstore than with counselling services. Not surprisingly, the responses were unrelated to intentions of returning.

Question 5: "The library has many books and periodicals pertaining to my program."

Students not planning to return for their second year were slightly more critical of the library, but this difference was not statistically significant.

Question 6: "The library staff is courteous and helpful."

Indeed, that is how the students saw them: almost nine out of every ten (89%) agreed. Responses were not related to intention of returning for the second year.

Question 7: "Students have an effective voice in formulating college policy."

Of the 289 respondents, only 69 (24%) agreed with this statement. One hundred forty (48%) disagreed, and 80 (28%) had no opinion or refused to answer. Disagreement was strongest among those in attrition groups B and C, that is, among those respondents who did not state that they were likely to return. This relationship proved to be statistically significant, and suggests that there may be a connection between the dissatisfaction which students expressed with their participation in college policy-making on the one hand, and their intention to complete their program on the other.

However, that connection may not be a causal one, and students who drop out may do so for reasons that are only indirectly related to such dissatisfaction. Other factors, some of them quite external to the institution, can and do work on student attitudes, on perceptions and misperceptions, and on the ultimate decision to leave. Some of these factors will be discussed below.

Question 8: "Many students here are made unhappy by useless little rules and regulations."

Overall, only about three out of every ten respondents (30%) agreed that this was the case. However, those who said that they would probably not return for their second year were much more likely to agree (54% did). As in Question 7 above, this points to a statistically significant relationship, and the same cautions apply.

Question 9: "The subjects which make up my program are:

(a) better than I expected them to be
(b) about as I expected them to be
(c) worse than I expected them to be
(d) no opinion"

As may be expected, the answers to this question were strongly related to the students' stated intention to return for the second year of their program. Of those planning to return, only one-fifth (20%) indicated dissatisfaction with their subjects; of those not planning to come back, over three-quarters claimed to be dissatisfied.

Question 10: "I have seriously considered changing my program:

(a) often
(b) occasionally
(c) rarely or never"

Predictably, students intending to return for their final year were less likely to indicate that they often considered changing their program (6% did so) than students who thought it unlikely that they would come back (38%). However, as was shown, there were at least some instructors who did not distinguish between those students who did not belong in their program, and those who did not belong in college. As a result, it may have been one thing for a student to consider a change of programs abstractly, but quite another thing to obtain meaningful guidance and support from an instructor in making such a change.

Question 11: "I have seriously considered dropping out of the college:

(a) often
(b) occasionally
(c) rarely or never"

Again predictably, the responses here were strongly related to the intentions of students to return for their second year. Students who often thought of dropping out are also less likely to intend to come back; students who rarely or never entertain such thoughts typically expect to show up for their second year.

Question 12: "I expect to return in September to complete the second year of my program:

(a) almost definitely
(b) possibly
(c) probably not
(d) no opinion"

As was mentioned above, this question formed the basis for selecting the three attrition groups.

Question 13: "After I leave the college, I intend to find a job that is in the field of my program:

(a) yes, if possible
(b) no
(c) don't know"

Exactly half (50%) of the respondents who thought that they would probably not return for their second year still hoped to obtain program-related employment. However, better than nine out of every ten (92%) of those who expected to come back for their second year expected to find program-related employment.

Question 14: "Generally speaking, the instructors who teach in my program are:

(a) very familiar with their subject
(b) reasonably familiar with their subject
(c) not too familiar with their subject"

Fully half (50%) of the respondents who stated that they did not expect to return to complete their program judged their instructors to be less than very familiar with their subject. Fewer than one-quarter (24%) of those intending to return were of the same opinion.

Question 15: "Generally speaking, the instructors who teach in my program present their material:

(a) very clearly
(b) reasonably clearly
(c) not too clearly"

Only about one in ten (10%) of those who expected to return found that their instructors were not too clear. However, one-third (33%) of those not planning to come back reported a lack of clarity on the part of instructors.

The Search for Objectivity. The student survey resembled the head instructor interviews in one particular: both brought out the biases and, perhaps, the defensive reactions of some of the people in each group. We saw instructors who honestly believed that the students who did not do well in their program were also "unsuited for anything else"; we saw students who had trouble with their classes stating that the instructors were "not too familiar with the material", which in any case they presented "not too clearly."

In the hope of arriving at some objective conclusions in these matters, I recommended that the college retain the services of a well-established psychologist for the purpose of conducting in-depth interviews with present and former students, both persisters and drop-outs.

I did not dare suggest that instructors be interviewed as well.

The administration received an interim report, and approved the hiring of Dr. Winston H. Mahatoo, a full professor at McMaster University in Hamilton.

V. The Student Interviews. During the late Spring of 1973, Dr. Mahatoo conducted 19 group interviews with current and former students. The average size of each group was four; the total number of subjects was 76. They included:

- seven students then enrolled in the first year of two-year programs who had stated that they would likely return for their second year (one group),

- ten students then enrolled in the first year of two-year programs who had stated that they would probably not return for their second year (two groups),

- ten students then enrolled in the first year of two-year programs who had stated that they would possibly return (two groups), and

- forty-nine former students who had dropped out (14 groups).

Although some effort was made to obtain a representative sample, participants were not randomly selected. In some respects, this was a sample of convenience; no attempt was made, for instance, to track down former students who had moved away. A fee of five dollars was paid to those who participated in the interviews.

What the Psychologist Found. Two main conclusions emerged from the interviews:

(1) There appeared to be no reationship between dropping out of school and intelligence. As a general rule, bright students were as likely to drop out as those less able.

(2) The primary reason for which the students in this study left school related to a problem specific to their age-group - an identity crisis often found in late adolescence and young adulthood.

Those who persisted in their program had a clear sense of what they wanted and were well-motivated to work toward it. Like the drop-outs, they would encounter occasional frustrations; unlike them, they were able to place these in their proper perspective. They could cope with minor and temporary adversity.

In contrast, those who had dropped out lacked a clear sense of direction and had a much lower frustration threshold. The tended to be highly critical of the curriculum and the quality of instruction, and showed a strong resentment of authority. They accused faculty members of lacking understanding and sympathy, administrators of being aloof and distant, and the institution itself of being cold and bureaucratic - much like a factory where the main emphasis is on the the number of units produced.

Drop-outs also tended to rationalize. Those who had found work pointed to their employment as a justification for their decision to leave: "Good jobs are hard to get." Deeper probing suggested that such a change of heart in the middle of the program usually only reflected a lack of clear goals and strong motivation. (Good jobs may be hard to find, but better jobs await those who graduate.)

In some respects, the drop-outs knew what was good for them and acted in their own best interests. Overwhelmed by indecision and frustration, they saw their withdrawal from the college not a as a final termination of their studies, but as a moratorium, a tempoary interruption which gave them a chance to think things over and reconsider their plans. Other evidence suggests that, often, personal growth can occur during such a moratorium; goals can be clarified; indeed, the fact is that many who once dropped out return to finish their program at a later date. Viewed in this light, a temporary withdrawal from studies may be an interlude that is psychologically beneficial, and perhaps even necessary, for many students.

Granted: the views of many drop-outs were heavily colored by low self-esteem, low frustration levels, and serious misunderstanding of the facts. Nonetheless, it was apparent that at least a few of their complaints were justified.

* There were too many instances where inaccurate or incomplete pre-enrolment information had been given out.

* In the absence of a uniform college-wide attendance policy, the practice of each instructor setting his or her own rules had resulted in glaring inconsistencies and the perception of arbitrary and capricious enforcement.

* Some serious departures from good instructional and administrative practice had come to light - instructors who failed to carry through on commitments to students, administrators who reversed their decisions or ruled inconsistently.

Finally, there was no evidence that sizeable numbers of students came to college only to obtain a student loan or grant, fully intending to withdraw once the money had been paid to them. The few cases which had aroused this suspicion turned out to be students who had already decided to leave for other reasons, but who had delayed implementation of their decision until the grant had been obtained.

Some Suggested Remedies. Given these conclusions, the following remedies almost suggested themselves to Dr. Mahatoo:

(1) Since the main problem of many drop-outs was difficulty in adjusting to the college setting, the college should make a special efort to foster an atmosphere of emotional warmth, sympathy and helpfulness.

(2) There was a demonstrated need to provide students with more complete and accurate pre-enrolment information, to refer them to effective in-course counselling when necessary, and to provide them with on-going explanations of what they were doing and why they were doing it. There was a consequent need to make instructors and counsellors more sensitive to student problems, and in particular to the subtle signs that a student might drop out.

(3) Because some questionable instructional and counselling practices had become established, there appeared to be a need to monitor more closely the competence of faculty and counsellors.

(4) There was an equal need to tighten up administrative procedures. In some matters were there were no college-wide rules, a need had become apparent to formulate them; attendance rules were the prime example. In other instances, rules existed but were interpreted and enforced inconsistently in the various programs; the problem here was one of assuring their uniform application.

(5) In order to dispel the image of institutional rigidity, it was suggested that some flexibility be introduced into the various curricula, permitting the students to enrol in at least a few electives of special interest to them.

(6) Finally, it had become apparent that there was a need to revise the student student information system then in use. The data in the existing system were neither complete nor reliable, and proved all but useless for the purposes of program review and evaluation.

VI. Reaction. Reports on the work which I had done (the policy review, the head instructor interviews, and the student survey) and on the results of Winston Mahatoo's in-depth interviews were made available to all college staff. The reaction is best summarized by the senior administrator who was given the responsibility for acting on our findings:

"On August 28," he wrote, "a meeting was held to discuss two studies of student attrition at the college. The morning session, which was an open forum, was a rather depressing experience for all of us. Faculty members and administrators alike seemed to feel that they were personally being declared guilty in situations where they lacked full control. There was an element of skepticism, too, as to whether anything will be done to alleviate the situation."

Feelings of guilt and fear surfaced in various ways.

One response was simple censorship. To illustrate the point that many drop-outs perceived the college as cold and bureaucratic, it had been stated in one of the reports that "in a sense, this attitude was personified by [a senior executive officer], who was described as aloof and rigid, as a 'Howard Hughes' isolating himself in a 'glass castle'."

Perhaps this reference was unfair even if it was true, since it identified a single individual. In any case, the reference was deleted before the report was released. (Incidentally, this is the only instance where censorship was imposed throughout the process.)

Some questioned basic assumptions: "If attendance records are to be maintained, then there would be value in checking the correlation of attendance to attrition." In any case, too much class time would be eaten up by checking attendance, especially in the larger classes.

College problems were blamed on others. Misleading information about programs was certainly not the fault of college staff; that problem would be solved if only high school counsellors would refer their students directly to the college.

Many of the staff were just silent.

Finally, there was a somewhat unexpected development when a new issue was raised. Although I had commented extensively on the lack of communication between instructors and counsellors, and Dr. Mahatoo had pointed to the fact that many students perceived some parts of the administration as cold, bureaucratic and arbitrary, neither of us had stated that the college administration was isolated from the academic life of the institution. This did not keep staff from pointing to the perceived isolation of the administration as a cause of high attrition and therefore an issue for discussion. Of course, administrators denied the charge:

"There did not appear to be serious problems in the minds of the students I talked to, and most felt that the administration was available to them and very co-operative and receptive to student requests," one wrote in a widely-quoted memo. "Similarly, when talking to faculty I got the feeling that they did not feel that administrators were too isolated from the academic process..."

In the end, there was a recognition that at least some of our findings were sound and required action. Five working committees were formed to find detailed solutions; then, representatives from all five committees met to consolidate the working committees' recommendations, and to add two of their own.

Their first additional recommendation was a ringing endorsement of the process: "It is recommended that the college continue to use research to study emerging problems on an on-going basis." Further: "It is recommended that a percentage of the annual operating budget be allocated to research projects," and "that fully documented and costed prospective research projects be submitted to the Academic Planning Committee for approval on a priority basis." Although the experience had been traumatic, its value was apparent to most.

The second was a swipe at the administration, not totally undeserved but not really supported by the attrition studies: "Since the committee felt that there is great validity in the attrition report observation that the college administration is too isolated, it is recommended that steps be taken to provide closer working relationships among the various groups of the college."

Several useful suggestions emerged from working committees and were eventually implemented to a greater or lesser degree:

* The idea that a Master Teacher, elected by the faculty in each division of the college, might act as a resource person to visit classes on request and to assist instructors on their teaching methodology.

* The proposal that one counsellor be assigned specifically to each division in the college, that (s)he be encouraged to visit divisional offices, and even visit classrooms.

* The realization that not only must instructors keep better track of students, but that a records committee was needed to review and overhaul the student information system.

* The blunt statement that "misleading television promotions be stopped and that we introduce a higher level of integrity in promoting college programs."

* A delicately-worded suggestion to administrators that they "review their true function in the organization and evaluate their performance by that criterion."

This ended my involvement in the study of attrition among community college students. I returned to teaching duties for another two years; then I left the college to accept an administrative appointment in Alberta.

Looking back on the experience more than a decade later, I now realize that the study of attrition had many consequences which I did not forsee at the time. Perhaps the college administration did not forsee them either, and if they did, they must be admired for going ahead in any case. Painful though the process was, the end result not only strengthened the college, but also provided important lessons to us and to others. These went beyond the phenomenon of attrition, bringing out truths about human behavior, about our assumptions and perceptions, about the pitfalls of making and administering policy, about the way in which conflicting interests can be reconciled, and about the impact which applied research can have on an institution.

I will return to these more general considerations after briefly reviewing the remaining work.

VII. A Different Setting: Northern Alberta. In 1976, I began a five-year association with Alberta's Department of Advanced Education and Manpower. Most of this time was spent at the two northern vocational centres in Lac La Biche and Grouard. These two institutions deliver adult basic education as well as other adult programs not more than one year in length. At that time, most of the students who attended were Indian or Metis.

They differed from the respondents in the Ontario studies in three major respects: they were older, they had less previous education, and they came from a different cultural background. The also dropped out differently.

A one-year program in Native Arts and Crafts that was run in 1977-78 was not unusual. All but one of its students were native; most were over twenty-five.

* Thirty-seven students had applied for admission; of these, twenty-four were accepted.

* Of the twenty-four, three (12.5%) completed all fourteen modules by the end of the year and were awarded certificates. One student had enrolled intending to take just one module, completed it successfully, and left.

* Eighteen (75%) completed some modules and received letters of standing. Of the eighteen, eight continued in the program the following year.

* Two students left after attending one day only.

Of particular interest to the student of attrition are the ten who completed one or more modules but did not return the following year, as well as the two who left after one day. (Those two may well have been victims of an identity crisis.) According to the official records, these were the reasons for which these twelve left:

* Five (including the two who left after one day) were terminated from the program by the institution for absenteeism.

* Two were terminated by the institution for vandalism and destruction of property.

* One left because of illness, and one because of untreated alcoholism.

* One left to accept employment.

* One left because of family responsibilities.

* One left because her family moved from the community.

To say that students were terminated for absenteeism does not, of course, explain the underlying reasons for dropping out. A program advisory committee made up largely of Indian and Metis members noted that poor attendance and heavy attrition are fairly common in the schools with which they had had experience, and suggested that a stricter approach by the instructors and the administration with regard to attendance might be indicated. Also, "a future follow-up should be undertaken to explore the deeper psychological reasons why ...so many leave without completing all of the program requirements."

That psychological study was never done, but it seems clear that in this case, the identity crisis of late adolescence and early adulthood was not the major factor. The problems which these students encountered were the problems of so many Indians who are trying to live in a society whose cultural values are alien to them. The results can be devastating - illness, alcoholism, violence, and all to often, just a quiet desperation. The outcome of all this is that they drop out of school.

Although there were no in-depth student interviews, the head instructor of a similar program at a sister institution expressed the view that one major cause of students dropping out was a lack of daycare. A number of his students were mothers of young children, and in his experience the most common reason for which students dropped out was a problem with child care. Others were jealous spouses (surprisingly common), alcoholism (again) and cultural isolation of an unexpected kind: being the only Slavey Indian in a class dominated by Crees.

There was also a clash of cultural values between students and instructor. The Indian students expected <u>their</u> program to deal with arts and crafts that were well-known to them, and that were fun to do; the Caucasian instructor stressed the importance of precise workmanship, historical authenticity, and a serious attitude toward the work required in <u>his</u> program. When a native arts and crafts program is taught by a Caucasian, then whose program is it, anyway?

An Unresolved Question. During my time in northern Alberta, I participated in several follow-up studies of students in adult basic education programs. The subjects of these studies were young Natives who had dropped out of the K-12 system, found that they could not get work, and returned a few years later to resume their education. Some stayed in school for several years, and eventually completed Grade 12; others left in mid-year without completing anything.

From institutional records, it was possible to obtain their employment status before they had entered adult basic education; fewer than one out of every five (18%) had been employed.

When these same people were contacted again - from six months to two years after they had left their program - almost two-fifths (39%) reported that they had a job.

The good news was that their employment rate had more than doubled; the bad news, that over sixty percent still did not work. The puzzle was that the employment rates were just about identical for the two groups. Those who had dropped out of the adult basic education program were just as likely to have a job as those who had completed their year.

There are several possible explanations. This was a group of relatively young people, and perhaps the process of maturation had worked equally on all. If so, the experience of going back to school would have had little to do with the increase in the employment rate; a similar increase should be observable in a control group of drop-outs from the K-12 system who had not entered an adult basic education program.

Alternatively, it is possible that the experience of returning to school had a beneficial effect whether or not the student stayed for the entire year. If so, a control group of K-12 dropouts who had not subsequently entered an adult basic education program should not show a similar increase in employment rates over the same period of time.

Then again, perhaps there was a general increase in employment opportunities resulting from a bouyant economy.

The phenomenon observed on this occasion needs closer study. Unfortunately, few institutions do research in this area, and fewer yet publish comparative employment rates of their graduates and their drop-outs.

Perhaps this would be a suitable thesis topic for a doctoral dissertation - if the researcher could get access to institutional records.

VIII. Dropping Out on an Indian Reserve. It is common knowledge that the drop-out rate in the K-12 schools is much higher among Native students than among Caucasians. Many explanations have been advanced for this. Some make racist assumptions; some are abstruse; some make good common sense. The experience of the Onion Lake Indian Band, which occupies a Reserve straddling the Alberta-Saskatchewan border, suggests that the curriculum may be an important factor.

By the standards of Indian bands in Canada's prairie region, the Onion Lake Band is relatively large. In 1981, there were three schools on the Reserve, serving over six hundred children from Kindergarten to Grade Twelve. Until that year, these schools had been administered directly by federal officials of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). Teachers and principals were hired by INAC, although there was local participation in this process; they followed the Saskatchewan provincial curriculum as required by INAC; their performance appraisals were conducted by INAC education officials.

Then, in 1981, the Band concluded an agreement with INAC by which some control over the Onion Lake Education System devolved to the Band. One of the Band's newly acquired powers was the right to hire and evaluate its own teachers and supervisors, subject only to the requirement that these employees qualify for teacher certification from Saskatchewan Education.

In 1982, I became the Band's first Superintendent of Education, hired by it and responsible to it for the administration of its schools, subject only to the terms of the Band's agreement with INAC.

I found a system that was plagued by many of the problems stereotypical of Indian schools: some inadequate facilities, an odd mix of dedicated teachers and others who were grossly incompetent, occasional use of the school system as a political football in Band politics, and a high drop-out rate. In fact, the rate was shoking: of the over six hundred children in this system as of October of 1981, only 54 were in Grades Nine to Twelve. Of over six hundred students, only five were in Grade Twelve at the end of that school year.

For the children going through the Onion Lake Education System, dropping out of high school was the rule, not the exception.

There were many contributing reasons. Saskatchewan provincial schools were built to standards that were from 36% to 43% more generous in their allocation of space per pupil than Indian schools - and two of the Band's three schools were old, dilapidated, and generally unsuitable. Books and other instructional materials were outdated, often left over from the time when the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches operated the schools on the Reserve, and reflecting the doctrines and values of those denominations. Few electives were offered in the Division Four program.

Ironically, it was possible for students to obtain standing to enter certain university programs, and several did. But the practical programs were totally inadequate. There were few classes in industrial arts or home economics, and none in business education.

One does not have to be an expert on Indian education to realize that for most children growing up on a semi-isolated Reserve, a university education is not a priority. To be sure, some of them are determined to go on to university, and overcome considerable obstacles in order to reach that goal. Most have other goals.

One thing worked in the favor of the Onion Lake Band. A few of the Band members recognized the need for making improvements, and were not deterred by political infighting, run-down facilities, or a lack of experience in giving direction to an education system. Because a few people were driven by a need to have better schools for their children, things began to happen:

* Computers were introduced into every Division I classroom, as well as into the high school.

* A nursery program was set up to improve the English-language skills of the many children who normally heard Cree spoken in their homes.

* A special education program was set up, and qualified specialists were hired.

* Perhaps most significantly, practical subjects were brought into Grades Nine to Twelve. There was more of industrial arts, more of home economics, a new outdoor education program, and eventually a business education program. The high school English program began to stress basic communication skills; less emphasis was placed on literature.

Staying in School on an Indian Reserve. These changes paid off. By October of 1983, enrolments in Grades Nine to Twelve had climbed to 144 (up from 54 just two years earlier); by year's end, there were sixteen students in Grade Twelve. Of course there were still too many drop-outs, but the fact that enrolments in Grades Nine to Twelve had increased by one hundred sixty-seven percent in just two years signalled an encouraging beginning to this Band's venture into local control of its schools.

By making the curriculum more relevant to the needs and interests of the students, the drop-out rate had been measurably reduced. Other changes helped, but clearly it was the new emphasis on practical courses that was most responsible for keeping these adolescents in school. In fact, there were many cases where the new curriculum lured back former drop-outs.

It seems that the curriculum can have an important effect on attrition.

IX. A Summary of Impressions. When a person dies, doctors do not ask, "What causes death?" Rather they ask, "What caused this death?" Similarly, educators should give up any notion that there might be a single explanation - or even a simple explanation - of why students drop out.

Factors Related to the Students Themselves. Students vary in many ways. They may be of all ages, either sex, or any ethnic group. They may have any level of education or any type of work experience. But any given program may well have a fairly narrow student profile. There are no young adult males in a job re-entry program; such programs are filled with older women attempting to return to the work force. In many technical programs, there is still a strong preponderance of men. Programs may be set up for Indians wanting to be teachers or teacher aides, and will be filled with Indian students. Many programs seem to attract their own special kind of student.

No group is perfect. This is a simple truth, not a reckless overgeneralization. Each age group has its own problems; the woes of the adolescent differ from the despair of old age. Each ethnic group carries with it its history, culture, and all the prejudices against it as well as those prejudices shared by many of its members. The problems of those who are functionally illiterate differ from those who are already highly educated, but there are problems that arise with the latter group as well as the former, and post-graduate university programs have their share of student problems and their share of drop-outs, too.

A program may, for historical or social reasons, attract students who share many characteristic. A program may also be especially designed for the needs of a definable group. Either way, the problems which are typical of the members of these groups are likely to become factors in attrition from the program.

In some cases, the institution can control admission to its programs, and it can reduce attrition to a minimum by carefully selecting its students. In other programs, there is little such control; the school gets what it gets. A college that offers a post-secondary business education program on an Indian reserve may have some control over admissions to the program, but it is clear that most or all of the students will be Indians themselves. If the college is sensitive, it must expect as a certainty that the students in this program will not share all of the deeper cultural values of its Caucasian instructors and curriculum developers.

Will that cause problems? It may.

Will it raise the drop-out rate? It may.

What is to be done?

I repeat: the study of attrition is a complex subject. It may seem that the best way to forestall problems would be to hire qualified Indian instructors for this hypothetical business education program. Although it may be difficult to find someone who is both an Indian and a business education instructor, it is by no means impossible. But having Indian instructors teaching Indian students can generate its own set of problems, as most Indian educators have found out. It is simply false that "an Indian is an Indian is an Indian." Just remember the Slavey who felt culturally isolated in a class of Crees.

There is no simple solution, but solutions can be found. They require, first, a sound understanding of the general principles that operate when students drop out. But more than that: they also require, secondly, a complete grasp of the program and its students. The example of the business education program for Indians assumes that many of the emerging problems will be cuture-related; but these two basic requirements apply also when the problems are non-cultural.

<u>What the Institution Can Do.</u> There are no secrets here. Institutional managers can reduce attrition to a minimum by acquiring and using sound information, and by following good management practices.

They must know who the students in each program are, what problems they are likely to face, and what the institution can do to help.

I do not intend to offer a short course in good teaching and administration at this time. Suffice it to say that in my experience, attrition has not usually been a major concern when the following were in place:

* Clarity of goals - both institutional goals and program goals.

* Appropriate policies and procedures, appropriately monitored.

* A well-planned and relevant curriculum, supported by effective learning materials.

* Accurate and comprehensive pre-enrolment counselling of applicants.

* Intelligent student selection where such selection is desirable.

* Competent instruction and supervision.

* Organizational efficiency, and especially good channels of informal and formal communications.

* A useful and accurate student information system - employed in a useful and accurate manner.

Perhaps this is a "motherhood statement". However, it should come as no surprise that there is a clear and demonstrable connection between low attrition and good educational practices.

Again: good practices are not everything. Without them, the attrition rate will surely climb; but they wi' be fully effective only if they are accompanied by accurate information about e students, skilful identification of their deeper needs and problems, and sound judgment in addressing those needs and problems.

External Factors: Coping with the Inevitable. Some of the most severe anxiety attacks from which adult educators suffer from time to time are those triggered by the fear that they will be blamed for attrition that is caused by something quite beyond their control. To be sure, such factors exist.

* Older adolescents and young adults are subject to the "identity crisis" that was found in the psychological study discussed above. No matter how good our information about our students is, no matter how polished our educational practices are, that identity confusion will always take its toll among our younger students.

* Indian children do, as a matter of fact, experience a higher drop-out rate than their Caucasian counterparts. The reasons for this may be sought in complex social and economic circumstances. Educators will not change this in the short run, although perhaps education holds part of the long-term answer. The point is this: no one who is working in a program aimed at Indian clients should be surprised if, under existing circumstances, the students experience higher attrition than a mainstream population attending a similar program.

* Women can get pregnant. Men do not. Attrition for reasons of pregnancy will not be a problem in a program that is filled with men; it may well be a problem in a program filled with young women. How many female students in any given program get preganant before completion is a factor that is largely, though not completely, beyond the control of administrators and instructors. The fact that it is women as opposed to men who drop out for this reason is presumably beyond anyone's control.

This of is all common knowledge. In some cases, there are long-term solutions. If we accept that Indian children tend to fare worse in school because of economic and social conditions, then the long-term answer is to improve those conditions. If young female students get pregnant because of ignorance or a careless lifestyle, then the long-term answer may be additional sex education or lifestyle education.

In the short term, the educator interested in minimizing the waste of resources that is implicit in attrition will be alert enough to recognize problems of this sort, do what little can be done, and make it as easy as possible for any student dropping out to re-enter a program at a later date, when the crisis has passed.

Drop-outs will always be with us, but as long as we take the notion of lifelong learning seriously, we must make it easy for them to drop back in.

The Problem of Pain. Attrition is painful for everyone concerned. It is painful for the students, who usually experience some sense of failure. That feeling may be masked by the harsh criticisms they level against their program or their institution, but it is real nonetheless. The hurt that drop-outs experience must heal before they can benefit from a return to school.

Attrition is also painful for instructors and administrators. They have been rejected; to cite an old pun, they have lost their class. As long as their pain persists, they will continue to see drop-outs as misfits unsuited for anything. Their retaliation for being rejected is to reject in turn. Drop-outs can expect little meaningful help from this quarter until that pain has been replaced by another response.

In another sense, attrition is painful to the common citizen who perceives that taxpayers' dollars are being wasted. This may generate political pressure to do something - anything - about this problem.

Pain is not a useless feeling. It is a signal that something is wrong. Therefore, it is a good signal, necessary for correction to occur. Needless guilt, on the other hand, is silly. Teachers and administrators can lessen their own pain and guilt by gaining a thorough understanding of the drop-out phenomenon. They will then be in a position to help drop-outs cope with their feelings.

The Study of Attrition as an Applied Science. This paper ends where it began. Attrition is a fact of life not only for adult learners, but for all learners not subject to compulsory attendance. This includes many high school students.

The nature of the recurrent concern with drop-outs suggests that attrition is poorly understood by the public, by educators, and by drop-outs themselves. It does, therefore, seem surprising that the subject has not been dealt with more systematically by university faculties of education. As a minimum measure, I would suggest that every education student wanting to teach at the secondary level be required to take at least one full course on attrition. Further academic work should be available to those wishing to specialize in the prevention and treatment of drop-out related problems.

In short, just as pathology is a major branch of medical science, so the study of attrition should be a major part of the discipline of education.

The difficulty is that today, the study of attrition is interdisciplinary. It requires knowledge and skills from several established fields, many outside of education proper and never offered at a university faculty of education. Senior professors at the faculties must look beyond traditional subjects such as those dealing with curriculum and instruction, or with the history and philosophy of education, if this useful field of study is to be recognized as a legitimate sub-discipline of education.

* * * * *

Appendix 1

Schedule of Questions to Head Instructors

Introductory statement: "As you probably know, I've been assigned to do full-time research this semester. One of the things that has top priority is attrition - students dropping out, students not coming back after summer vacation. I am going to have a look at all the data that we have on the students - age, sex, parents' education, grade point average - and see if any of this is related to attrition. I am also particularly interested in what head instructors have to say about attrition, since they are the ones who know the most about their program. That's why I want to talk to you."

Question 1: "Some students are better off out of school than in school. With others, it is a tragedy if they drop out. From your own experience, would you say that most students who drop out are in fact making the right decision - because they are not suited for your program - or do most drop-outs leave because of personal problems, financial difficulties, and so on?"

Code: 1 - Personal problems, financial difficulties, etc.
2 - Not suited
0 - Qualified answer, cannot say

Question 2: "At what time during the four semesters that students spend in your program is there the heaviest attrition?"

Code: 1 - During the first semester
2 - During the second semester
3 - Over the summer
4 - During the second year

Question 3: "Do you take attendance, either formally or informally?"

Code: 1 - Yes (or equivalent responses, such as "I count heads.")
2 - No

Question 4: "Some subjects are heavily skill-oriented - typing comes to mind. Others are more theory-oriented - perhaps mathematics. What would you say is the proportion of skill content in your program, and what is the proportion of theory content?"

Code: 1 - Any response indicating more than 50% skill content
2 - Any response indicating more than 50% theory content
0 - Any response indicating skill and theory being evenly divided

Question 5A: "How many students left your program last semester because they accepted a job in a related field? How about the semester before that?"

(Responses to this part of the question were not coded.)

Question 5B: "Are these students making the right decision? We know that jobs are hard to get...but sometimes a diploma is necessary, and students who drop out to accept a job make a mistake."

Code: 1 - Responses indicating that students are discouraged from accepting a job

2 - Responses indicating that taking a related job is acceptable to the head instructor

0 - Qualified response

Question 6: "How about the library? Is it used heavily or regularly in your program, or is it not used very much?"

Code: 1 - Used heavily or regularly

2 - Not used heavily or regularly

3 - It should be used heavily or regularly, but isn't

Question 7A: "Since September, have you referred any students to counselling?"

(Responses to this part of the question were not coded)

Question 7B (if the previous answer was "no"): "Oh, then there haven't been any serious problems in your program?"

Question 7C (if the answer was "yes"): "Did that solve the problem?"

Code: 1 - Any response indicating a positive attitude toward counselling

2 - Any response indicating a negative attitude toward counselling

3 - Any neutral response

Concluding statement: "Thanks a lot. I'll probably talk to you again. In the meantime, if there is any area where you think research is needed, let me know. Maybe we can get together and draw up a proposal."

Appendix 2

Student Questionnaire on the Effectiveness of College Services

This questionnaire gives you a chance to comment anonymously on the quality of college services, and the subjects which are offered. The purpose is to find out how students see these services and subjects, and to improve them.

GENERAL DIRECTIONS:

1. Answer each question by circling the appropriate answer.
2. In the space labelled "PROGRAM", write the name of your program.
3. In the space labelled "YEAR", write your year (first or second).
4. Be sure to answer every item.

PROGRAM:_____ YEAR:_____

KEY: SA - Strongly Agree
A - Agree
D - Disagree
SD - Strongly Disagree
NA - Not Applicable; Don't Know

1. The service offered by the Counselling Office is courteous and helpful.	SA	A	D	SD	NA
2. The service offered by the Finance Awards Office is courteous and helpful.	SA	A	D	SD	NA
3. The service offered by the Student Placement Office is courteous and helpful.	SA	A	D	SD	NA
4. The service offered by the Bookstore is courteous and helpful.	SA	A	D	SD	NA
5. The Library has many books and periodicals pertaining to my program.	SA	A	D	SD	NA
6. The Library staff is courteous and helpful.	SA	A	D	SD	NA
7. Students have an effective voice in formulating college policy.	SA	A	D	SD	NA
8. Many students here are made unhappy by useless little rules and regulations.	SA	A	D	SD	NA

9. The subjects which make up my program are:

   a. better than I expected them to be
   b. about as I expected them to be
   c. worse than I expected them to be
   d. no opinion

10. I have seriously considered changing my program:

   a. often
   b. occasionally
   c. rarely or never

11. I have seriously considered dropping out of the college:

   a. often
   b. occcasionally
   c. rarely or never

12. I expect to return in September to complete the second year of my program:

   a. almost definitely
   b. possibly
   c. probably not
   d. no opinion

13. After I leave the college, I intend to find a job that is in the field of my program:

   a. yes, if possible
   b. no
   c. don't know

14. Generally speaking, the instructors who teach in my program are:

   a. very familiar with their subject
   b. reasonably familiar with their subject
   c. not too familiar with their subject

15. Generally speaking, the instructors who teach in my program present their material:

   a. very clearly
   b. reasonably clearly
   c. not too clearly

THANK YOU. Please feel free to write any comments you have on the back of this form.

Appendix 3: Statistical Analysis of Responses to the Student Questionnaire (Preliminary)

TABLE 1: Relationship between the students' outcome of the Fall 1972 semester and their general field of study

	Semester outcome		
Field of study	Students completing semester	Students dropping out	TOTALS
Human Services	294	32	326
Business	214	41	255
Technical	237	37	274
TOTALS	745	110	855
Chi-square = 5.16	2 degrees of freedom		NOT SIGNIFICANT

TABLE 2: Relationship between the students' outcome of the Fall 1972 semester and program groups as defined by their attrition rates

	Semester outcome		
Program groups defined by their attrition rates	Students completing semester	Students dropping out	TOTALS
Group I (low)	228	9	237
Group II (medium)	319	49	368
Group III (high)	198	52	250
TOTALS	745	110	855
Chi-square = 31.48	2 degrees of freedom		SIGNIFICANT ($p \leq .05$)

The differences in the drop-out rates among the three fields of study (Human Services, Business, and Technical programs) are relatively small, and may be the result of chance variations. However, when programs of study are grouped according to their drop-out rates into low-attrition programs, medium-attrition programs, and high-attrition programs, the differences among the three program groups are statistically significant at the 5% level of confidence. This means that if only random selection were at work, a relationship such as this would occur just five times or less out of every hundred. The assumption is made, then, that other than chance variation is operating here.

TABLE 3: Relationship between students' intention to return for the second year and their attitude toward the Counselling Office.

	"The service offered by the Counselling Office is courteous and helpful."			
	Agree	Disagree	No answer or no opinion	TOTALS
Group A: Intend to return	64	2	101	167
Group B: May return	37	5	41	83
Group C; Unlikely to return	15	2	22	39
TOTALS	116	9	164	289

Chi-square = 7.93 4 degrees of freedom NOT SIGNIFICANT

TABLE 4: Relationship between students' intention to return for the second year and their perception of their influence on formulating college policy.

	"Students have an effective voice in formulating college policy."			
	Agree	Disagree	No answer or no opinion	TOTALS
Group A: Intend to return	47	70	50	167
Group B: May return	12	46	25	83
Group C: Unlikely to return	10	24	5	39
TOTALS	69	140	80	289

Chi-square = 11.69 4 degrees of freedom SIGNIFICANT ($p \leq .05$)

TABLE 5: Relationship between students' intention to return for the second year and their feelings about college rules and regulations.

"Many students here are made unhappy by useless little rules and regulations."

	Agree	Disagree	No answer or no opinion	TOTALS
Group A: Intend to return	37	92	38	167
Group B: May return	29	44	10	83
Group C: Unlikely to return	21	12	6	39
TOTALS	87	148	54	289

Chi-square = 18.84 4 degrees of freedom SIGNIFICANT ($p \leq .05$)

TABLE 6: Relationship between students' intention to return for thesecond year and their feelings about the subjects in their program.

"The subjects which make up my program are:

	...better than expected."	...about as expected."	...worse than expected."	TOTALS
Group A: Intend to return	38	88	33	159
Group B: May return	7	36	35	78
Group C: Unlikely to return	1	8	26	35
TOTALS	46	132	94	272*

Chi-square = 45.10 4 degrees of freedom SIGNIFICANT ($p \leq .05$)

* No answer or no opinion = 17 (omitted from table)

TABLE 7: Relationship between students' intention to return for the second year and their thoughts about changing programs.

	" I have seriously considered changing my program:			
	...often."	...occasionally."	...rarely or never."	TOTALS
Group A: Intend to return	10	26	131	167
Group B: May return	9	25	48	82
Group C: Unlikely to return	15	8	15	38
TOTALS	34	59	194	287*

Chi-square= 43.68 4 degrees of freedom SIGNIFICANT ($p \leq .05$)

*No answer or no opinion = 2 (omitted from table)

TABLE 8: Relationship between students' intention to return for the second year dropping out of college.

	"I have seriously considered dropping out of college:			
	...often."	...occasionally."	...rarely or never."	TOTALS
Group A: Intend to return	4	29	133	167
Group B: May return	8	45	29	82
Group C: Unlikely to return	18	13	8	39
TOTALS	30	87	170	287*

Chi-square = 113.32 4 degrees of freedom SIGNIFICANT ($p \leq .05$)

*No answer or no opinion = 2 (omitted from table)

TABLE 9: Relationship between students' intention to return for the second year and their intention to find program-related work

	"After I leave the college, I intend to find a job that is in the field of my program: Yes, if possible"	No"	Don't know"	TOTALS
Group A: Intend to return	154	2	11	167
Group B: May return	70	8	5	83
Group C: Unlikely to return	19	10	10	39
TOTALS	243	20	26	289

Chi-square = 49.56 4 degrees of freedom SIGNIFICANT ($p \leq .05$)

TABLE 10: Relationship between students' intention to return for the second year and their assessment of their instructors' familiarity with subject

	"Generally speaking, the instructors who teach in my program are: very familiar with subject"	reasonably familiar with subject"	not too familiar with subject"	TOTALS
Group A: Intend to return	125	33	7	165
Group B: May return	45	32	5	82
Group C: Unlikely to return	19	10	9	38
TOTALS	189	75	21	285*

Chi-square = 28.99 4 degrees of freedom SIGNIFICANT ($p \leq .05$)

*No answer or no opinion = 4 (omitted from table)

TABLE 11: Relationship between students' intention to return for the second year and their assessment of their instructors' clarity of presentation

"Generally speaking, the instructors who teach in my program present their material:

	very clearly"	reasonably clearly"	not too clearly"	TOTALS
Group A: Intend to return	42	103	17	162
Group B: May return	8	55	15	78
Group C: Unlikely to return	7	18	13	38
TOTALS	57	176	45	278*

Chi-square = 19.88 4 degrees of freedom SIGNIFICANT ($p \leq .05$)

* No answer or no opinion = 11 (omitted from table)

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